



Answering the Skills Question for Employers

Governor Mark R. Warner

As governor, I take very seriously my job as the top economic development officer for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The number one question I get asked when a business might locate or expand here is “what about your workforce?” “What are your schools like, what skills do workers have, and what programs are in place to train them?” Since October 2004, I’ve had a new tool to help with that answer.

Last fall, Virginia launched the Career Readiness Certificate, a portable skills credential. It’s an obvious benefit to workers who want to prove they have skills. But it also helps potential employers to determine people’s skills in a region and to decide to invest in a community. So it’s also a great tool for economic developers.

Because the Career Readiness Certificate is based on legally defensible assessments that clearly delineate the actual skills a person has, it is a most valuable tool in the hiring process. All an employer needs to do is to list the requirement for the Career Readiness Certificate at the Bronze, Silver, or Gold level on the job posting, and on the application form, as is currently done with the high school diploma or a college degree. Used as a pre-screening tool in this way, the Certificate can save many dollars and a great deal of time during the hiring process. Hiring costs are high -- but the cost of making a bad hire is even greater.

For potential employees or career seekers, the Certificate is a clear indication of what the recipient can do in terms of skills needed in the workplace. As a stand-alone credential, or as a complement to the high school diploma, GED, or college degree, the Certificate indicates the attainment of a crucial skill set. Each certificate has those skills listed on it. Even if an employer is unaware of WorkKeys, the ACT assessment tool that is used to assess the skills, this listing makes it very clear during the hiring process.

We’re already making great progress. And it’s progress we can quantify and advertise as an economic development tool. There are now many thousands of Virginians with the Career Readiness Certificate, and we have their skill levels entered in the Virginia Skills

Bank, a free, Web-based application that can be queried by zip code, geographic region, college district, and in many other ways, to show the skill levels of the populace in that region.

As the Career Readiness Certificate has been developed in the Commonwealth, we have also been working with many other states to encourage the development of a similar portable skills credential across economic regions. To date, a consortium of more than 17 states has been formed to work on this crucial economic development issue. Over the next two months, the consortium is expected to grow to more than 25 states, as there is widespread acceptance of the need for such a credential. I am proud that Virginia has led the way in this effort, and I am pleased that Virginia's regional economy will benefit from this work.

For more information on the Career Readiness Certificate and the Virginia Skills Bank, please visit www.crc.virginia.gov